

ORANGE'S NATIONAL NIGHT OUT GOES "ON THE ROAD"

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

ORANGE : This city's edition of the 2011 National Night Out observances was a variation of a theme Aug. 2.

Orange Police Director John Rappaport, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. and other organizers behind the city's annual effort kept the caravan but had the observances here in part of the Freddie Polhill Law and Criminal Justice Complex's parking lot.

A quarter of 26 Park St.'s lot - usually the fenced-in area for particular vehicles - was open for three hours Tuesday night. That 6 p.m. opening was also when the 15-vehicle caravan left police headquarters for a 72-minute, 6.9-mile motorcade across Orange's four geographic wards.

There were some 300 people in the lot when the motorcade returned by 7:12 p.m. There was a martial arts demonstration that had just begun in the lot's western quarter. Members of The Redeemed Christian Church of God Dominion Cathedral, who made their Orange NNO debut at 6 p.m., were still handing out Bible tracts.

There were 31 tables lining the inside of the Park and William streets' fencing. While the first 20 were for East Orange General Hospital, a face painter and other private or public vendors, two on the east end were for serving free grilled food. The remaining nine, along the

headquarters building wall was where many people sat to dine and/or watch the activities around them.

The activity included children walking in an inflatable "moon bounce" tent and a mini-trackless train in the lot's center.

"This is going very well," apprised Rappaport at 7:30 p.m. "We decided to move the night out here so we can draw more people in."

Orange has been part of National Night Out seemingly since the National Association of Town Watches started the event in 1983. The non-profit NATW designated the second Tuesday in August for participating towns, neighborhoods or military bases for people to first put their front porch lights on before sundown. Participants are to provide pot luck food and public safety officials provide safety and crime prevention tips.

NATW intended National Night Out for neighbors to get to know each other and to know what the local police, fire, ambulance and other first responders are doing to battle crime and disasters. It is intended for the neighbors to start block associations or watch groups from the night out.

Orange, for the record, has been a consistent Essex County NNO participant. Other "Local Talk" towns holding NNO events either by themselves or by

registering on NATW's Web site Aug. 2 included Bloomfield, East Orange, Glen Ridge, Irvington, Maplewood, Montclair, Newark and South Orange.

"Local Talk" listened to Rappaport while the Park Street event had hit full stride with 90 minutes to go. There were several men, women and children filing in from the William Street entrance at 5:57 p.m.

While "Local Talk" had attended NNOs before, sometimes several the same night, it had never been on a caravan. Rappaport pointed to one of 18 seats aboard the city's Senior Citizen 2010 Goshen-Ford mini bus as an invitation.

North Ward Councilwoman/Council President Tency Eason, Orange/Maplewood Police Chaplain Rev. Grace Jones and three boys were among the nine people who accompanied "Local Talk" on the bus. The three boys bolted the bus, however, to join nine other youths to ride atop the Orange Fire Department's 1969 Maxim Fire Engine No. 524.

Other motorcade vehicles included an International bank vault truck converted to Orange Police Department Special Response Unit use, OFD Engine No. 2, a leading OPD motorcycle and a stretched limousine from Dels Limo & Courier. Hawkins, Fire Chief Robert Manganeli and at-large council members Elroy

Corbit and Donna K. Williams were also among the caravan.

The Hampton Terrace Neighborhood Association was the caravan's first stop on its 27-turn journey. Founding father Eddie Myers said that the two-town block group has been a constant NNO participant.

"Local Talk" was about to accept a can of Canada Dry ginger ale, which was once bottled before pedestrians on Washington Street in the 1960s, when Hawkins ushered everyone back on board to their next stop - Fuller Terrace.

Seven-year resident Harold Johnson said that all 22 houses are part of the four-year old FTNA. Five home owners had posted "Mayor - Please Repave Our Street" signs among the cookout grills and basketball hoops.

The motorcade also stopped at Mountainview Avenue and Beech Street before proceeding through High Street and Park Avenue. Many people honked horns or waived their acknowledgement along the way.

The tour allowed people to see construction progress at the Walter G. Alexander Village and the Grand Central complex plus the rebuilding of 399 Lincoln Ave. Some veteran observers said that past motorcades, however, used to make up to 10 stops and would not end until 10 p.m.